

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

December 23, 2004

President George W. Bush
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President:

We are writing to request your assistance in a matter of great importance to the Congressional Western Caucus and our many western and rural constituents. As you know, the Payments in Lieu of Taxes (PILT) program has been in place since 1976 to compensate local governments for the loss of taxable property where federal lands exist. However, the PILT program is consistently underfunded, which causes undue hardship in many communities in our districts and around the West.

We believe the Payment in Lieu of Taxes program is not merely another government program. PILT was established to address the fact that the federal government does not pay taxes on the land that it owns. By not fully funding PILT the federal government is forcing citizens in close to 1,800 counties in 49 States to pay more in local property taxes than they should be paying. While it is true that Department of Interior budget requests in recent years have included modest increases for PILT, the Administration's Budget Requests have still fallen far short of full funding.

The federal government has an obligation to compensate local governments where federal lands exist. Not fully funding PILT hurts Western schools, law enforcement, health clinics, fire departments, road maintenance, and other local entities that depend on these funds. The affected communities believe in limited government and local control, yet they have no way to compensate for the limited tax base in their communities due to the existence of federal lands.

We are deeply aware of the limitations presented by our current fiscal situation. Indeed, it is important to note that many of us have supported offsets in Interior and Related Agency spending to pay for PILT increases. While we realize the federal government must balance many needs, we believe it is time for the Administration to demonstrate its commitment to our local communities by requesting a fully-funded PILT program.


For these reasons, we ask you to join us in this effort. Please help by considering how to fully fund PILT in your Interior Department Budget Request for fiscal year 2006. We look forward to working with you to find ways to meet our federal obligations to our rural counties.

Thank you for your consideration of this important request.

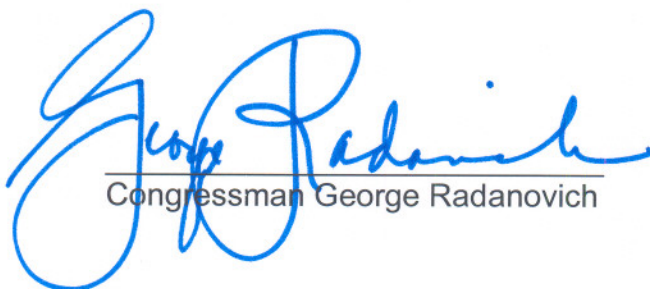
Sincerely,



Congressman Chris Cannon



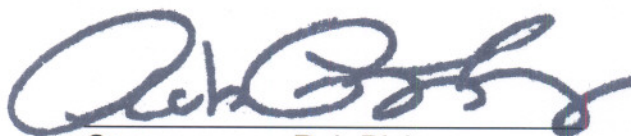
Congressman Stevan Pearce



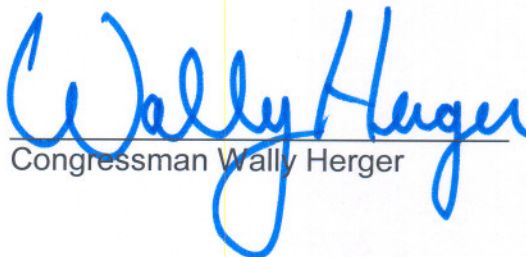
Congressman George Radanovich



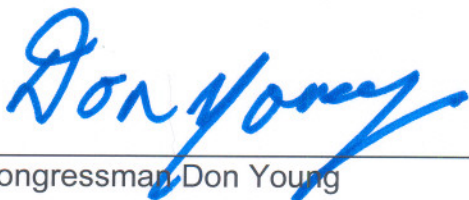
Congressman Doc Hastings



Congressman Rob Bishop



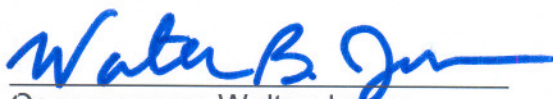
Congressman Wally Herger



Congressman Don Young



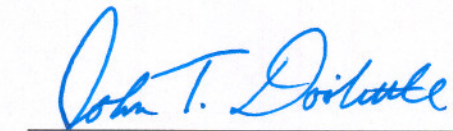
Congressman Tom Tancredo




Congressman Walter Jones

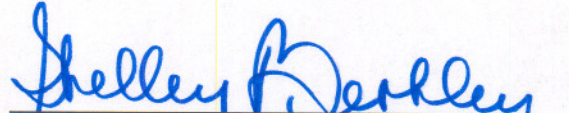


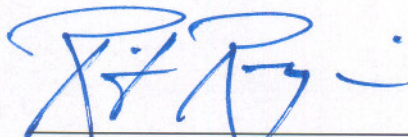
Congresswoman Barbara Cubin



Congressman John Doolittle


Congressman Jim Matheson


Congressman Jim Gibbons


Congresswoman Shelley Berkley


Congressman Rick Renzi


Congressman Trent Franks